

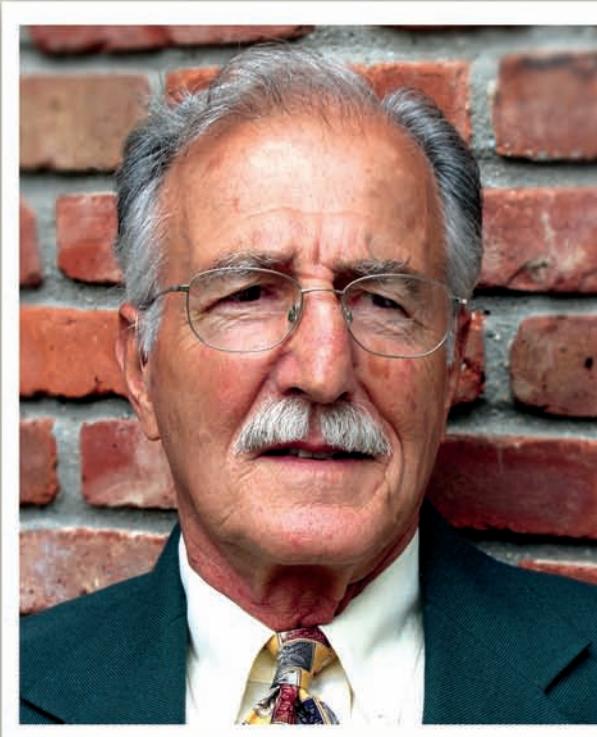
SAL DiFAZIO

Salvatore DiFazio traveled an unusual route to wrestling excellence. Attending Mepham High School as an All-League baseball player, he graduated from Ithaca College and served as an officer in the United States Marine Corps from 1955 to 1957. He attended Columbia University and received his master's degree in 1960.

Sal began his teaching career in the Half Hollow Hills School District in 1960; he coached baseball for 12 years and taught business education for 28 years. But everything changed in 1961, when at the request of his athletic director, Sal DiFazio was hired as the school's very first wrestling coach. Although Sal was unsure about the new position, he was determined to succeed. Armed only with his strong athletic background, Sal taught himself how to wrestle by reading books and attending clinics by Sprig Gardner and others. For the next 27 years, Salvatore DiFazio had a new passion — wrestling.

Coach DiFazio began the wrestling program at the junior high level for one year, and in 1962, Half Hollow Hills had its very first varsity wrestling team. When the school expanded, Coach DiFazio had the school design the wrestling room that Half Hollow Hills wrestlers use today. To motivate his new wrestlers, Coach DiFazio started the HHH Wall of Fame.

Sal's teams competed with powerhouse Brentwood High School. In 1975, in front of a packed gym of more than 2,000 people, Half Hollow Hills ended Brentwood's 79-match winning streak and their quest for a 10th straight league title by winning the



dual meet 22-18. The win also earned Half Hollow Hills the League I Title.

In 1971, Half Hollow Hills became the first team in New York State to field two varsity and junior varsity wrestling teams. For the next ten years, the "black" and "red" teams had 48 student-athletes wrestle every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. It was a lot of hard work, but Coach DiFazio felt that the best way to keep students interested in the sport was to give them matches every week. Many teams today follow the same format, creating "B" teams to keep students involved. He did this with the help of only two assistant coaches, Tom Finn and Joe Goonan.

In 1978, Coach DiFazio led Half Hollow Hills to its first and only Suffolk County title, edging rival Huntington High School by five points. Half Hollow Hills crowned one county champion, Mike Rogers, and had four place winners. For his

efforts, he was awarded the Suffolk County Coach of the Year for 1978.

Salvatore DiFazio retired in 1988 and was awarded the Grand Master Award by the Suffolk County Coaches Association. Coach DiFazio finished his coaching career with 239 varsity dual meet wins, three league championships and the 1978 county championship. He coached 22 league champions, 24 Suffolk County place winners, five county champions, and two New York State place winners.

More importantly, Coach DiFazio's wrestlers learned the importance of hard work, goal setting, accountability, dealing with failure, and how important it is to have a passion in life. He expected his wrestlers to conduct themselves in a professional manner, "show humility in victory and be gracious in defeat." He made sure his athletes respected their teammates, opponents and coaches. Coach DiFazio always led by example and was a great role model to his wrestlers. Eight of his wrestlers and assistants went on to become teachers and head wrestling coaches.

For 55 years Sal has been married to his lovely wife, Mary Lou. They raised five children and spend time with their 14 grandchildren. He now enjoys his retirement spending time in Newfoundland, Pennsylvania and Sunset Beach, North Carolina.

Sal DiFazio is known as the father of Half Hollow Hills wrestling. His commitment to the sport of wrestling and to teaching his wrestlers to act like champions on and off the mat have earned him a place in the National Wrestling Hall of Fame for Lifetime Service to wrestling.

(Left) Sal intently watching his Half Hollow Hills team in action. He had 239 career dual meet wins. (Below) Sal is shown in the wrestling room with some of his team working on a pinning combination.

